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8 March 1968

Historical Note

Subject: Proposed Historical Marker for Allen W. Dulles,
in CIA Headquarters' Lobby

CIA is getting a new and prominent historical "footnote," as it were, in the form of an impressive marble plaque which I inadvertently previewed yesterday noon, in the main lobby of the Headquarters building, and which is now veiled, for the time being, against the day of a historical ceremony in the near future--doubtless the 75th birthday of Mr. Dulles on Sunday, April 7, 1968.

It is a beautiful piece of white marble, exquisitely carved in a relatively simple classical style, with the bust of Mr. Dulles, measuring about 40 inches across and 24 inches high, with the carving of the bust measuring about 10 or 12 inches in diameter. It was inserted yesterday by the stone masons along the massive and hitherto empty north wall, across the lobby opposite from the wall that carries the Biblical inscription "... ye shall know the truth ...".

The Historical Staff was not consulted in the clearance, from a technical historical point of view, of what will become a major historical marker on CIA's premises. This is too bad, I think, and a departure from a long established precedent, followed by Messrs. Smith, Dulles, and McCone, when the Historical Staff was normally given the opportunity to kibitz on proposed historical items that were intended for public consumption.

There are three major defects, I think, in this new historical marker--defects which were noticeable instantly to me, in the minute or two when I was standing in the lobby yesterday, and which will surely be quickly noticed by any discerning public-relations expert or knowledgeable historical critic:

(1) An unfortunate sepulchral style: the deathly white marble, in the very shape and size of a cover for a crypt in a mausoleum. It is a beautiful piece of marble, but it looks simply ghastly (literally); and cryptic, too, literally and figuratively, as the critics will instantly put it in their public comments about CIA's new monument to itself. And in its style it may, indeed, be a traumatic experience for the enfeebled Mr. Dulles himself, when this cryptic piece of marble is unveiled in his presence.

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(2) The pseudo-historical inscription, "1953-1961" is wholly misleading and, again, epitaphial in style and appearance, rather than as something "living":

(a) The style of dating, "1953-1961," inscribed as it is in white marble, is taken directly from tombstone and headstone practice, and suggests strongly that the subject is indeed quite dead.

(b) The plaque is actually missing a genuinely historical date, in brass or otherwise, to indicate what particular occasion, if any, was being used for installing this major adornment to the CIA building. Missing a real date, the plaque will soon appear to have been installed at the time the building was opened -- in 1961!!

(3) The literary inscription "His monument is around us." is most un-literary. (If it has any derivation in established literature, I do not know of it, either in secular or religious literature, U.S. or foreign.) Furthermore, it is most inaccurate:

(a) Actually the "monument around us," if it is the building itself that is being celebrated or denoted, was not only Mr. Dulles' promotion but due also to the leadership of others as well, not least of all the architects Harrison and Abramovitz (and Frederic R. King, consulting architect, and the Tompkins-Jones construction combine), all of whom have already been well celebrated, properly and fully so, in the cornerstone a few feet away.

(b) If, instead, it is not the building but the organization of CIA that is the "monument ... around us," this too is an excessively hyperbolic inscription to Mr. Dulles. Actually he was not the "architect" of CIA, and had little to do with the establishment of CIA itself, in 1946-47; and he was only one of several major figures who figured in the reorganizations of CIA as an organization, in 1948-51. His career, on the other hand, extended far beyond the eight brief years when he was DCI, and extended back in time to World War I, when he first entered U.S. intelligence under President Wilson.

(c) Actually, the word "monument," which is so prominently made the central theme of the Dulles inscription, does literally mean, in its most common and general and popular connotation, "a structure, edifice, or erection intended to commemorate a notable person, action, or event" (Dictionary of Historical English and other dictionaries.) The connotation is strictly of a by-gone,

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non-current, dead matter which, in the common parlance, is "of historical interest only." The total semantic effect of an inscription celebrating this "monument," and celebrating Mr. Dulles' personal responsibility for this "monument," is sepulchral, epitaphial, and even apocalyptic. To the cynic (and there will be many of them who will cross this public, unclassified lobby of CIA in the years ahead), such a cryptic slab does indeed have an effect that is apocalyptic and (in the jargon of literary critics today) the musings of a "death wish." It is reminiscent, in fact, of the thrust of several passages of Kirkpatrick's recent book on the so-called "Real CIA," in which he seems seriously to advance the notion that one day there will be no need for the U.S. to have a national intelligence service.

The phrase "His monument is around us" is inept, I think, from a literary-historical point of view. The word "monument" has as often as not been used in an invidious sense, when it has appeared explicitly in literature. E.g.:

Pliny the Younger's Letters, quoting Frontinus: "a monument is a useless expense; our memory will live, if our life deserved it."

In praise of Georgius Fabricius, 1494-1555, quoted from Agricola's "De Re Metallica" in a translation by Herbert C. Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover: "Death comes to all, but great achievements raise a monument which shall endure until the sun grows cold."

Sir Christopher Wren (see below), inscription to him at St. Paul's Cathedral, commented on cynically by a clergyman, R. H. Barham, (1788-1845): "... and talking of epitaphs, much as I admire his [Wren's] which an erudite verger translated to me, 'If you ask for his monument, Sir-come-spy-see'" (from Barham's "The Cynotaph"). According to one book of quotations (W.F.H. King, 1958 ed.) Wren's has been cruelly suggested as an appropriate epitaph for certain "successful" medical and pastoral practitioners, as they lie in the churchyard surrounded by their former patients.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1857): "... The marble keeps merely cold and sad memory of a man who would else be forgotten. No man who needs a monument ever ought to have one."

It is possible that the phrase on CIA's new historical marker ("His monument is around us") was formulated by someone in CIA who had read the famous inscription to Sir Christopher

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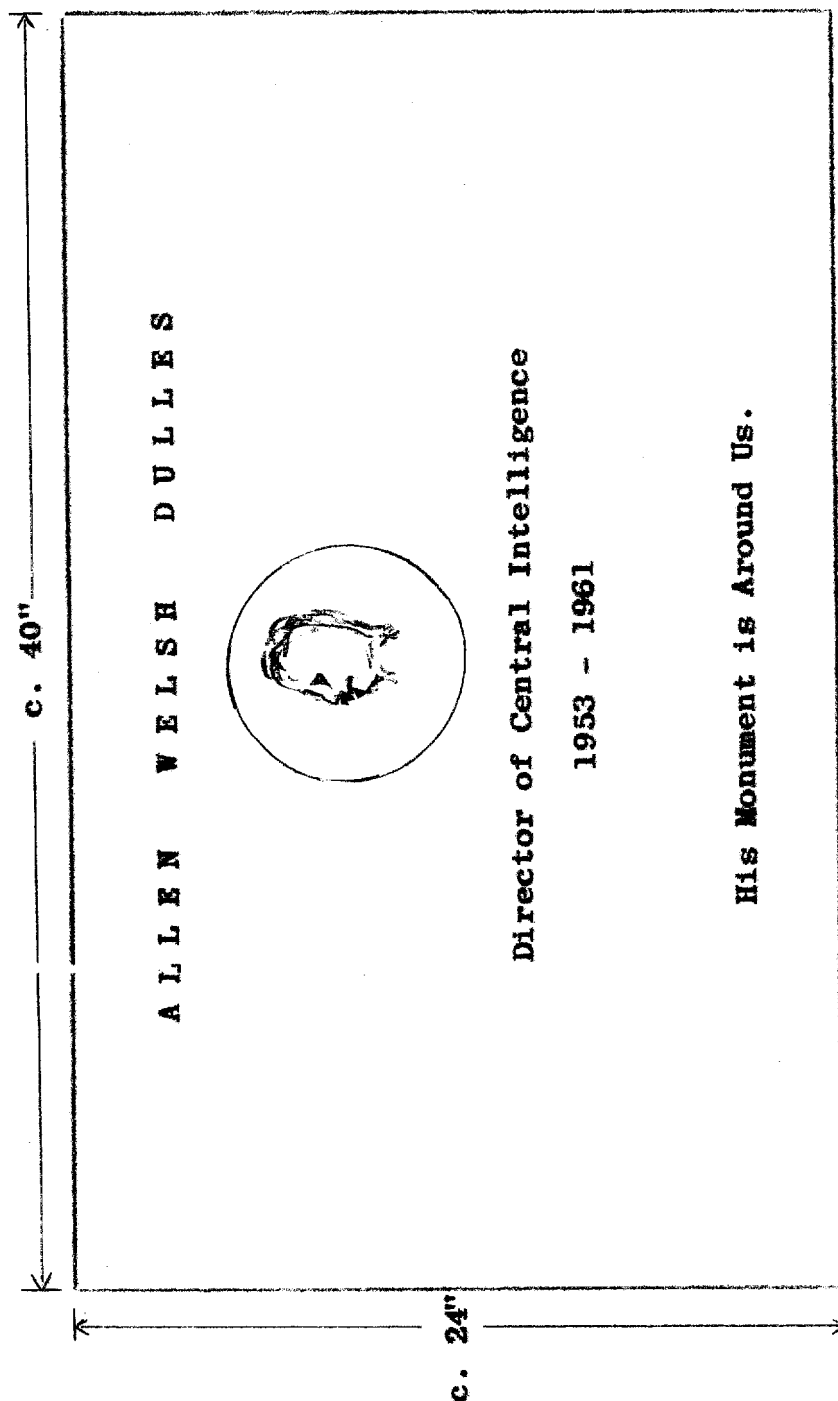
Wren (who indeed was an architect, unlike Dulles), 1632-1732, written by his son, over the interior of the north door of St. Paul's, London: "Si monumentum requiris, circumspice: If you would see his monument, look around." But this hardly does justice to Mr. Dulles, who (whatever he was) was not an architect of the building and only one of several "architects" of the successive reorganizations of CIA during the years of his long and distinguished career in U.S. intelligence.

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